

Theology and gender

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COMPILER'S COMMENTS

In order to explore the theme for this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*, I asked a group of my friends to write the articles you find in the following pages. I have also included a poem introduced to me at Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference because, like the articles, it demonstrates the centrality of women's lived realities as we express our faith and frustration. The contributors in this *Report* are people I know, respect, and enjoy—my conversations with each of them over the years has left me feeling enriched and enlivened. Their desire to be transformed and shaped by Christian feminist and womanist¹ questions and answers is integrated into their understanding of their faith and belief. As a theologian-in-training, I believe that it

is absolutely critical that we find ways to create avenues of conversation among friends to lay bare our vulnerabilities, be honest about our disappointments and limitations, reflect on how we sense God—through the living Christ—to be changing our reality, and use all those things to forge new consensus about what it means to be human beings seeking the will of God and the welfare of all that God has made. In this sense, these articles, or better yet conversation pieces, address some of the questions and concerns held closely to the heart, head and soul of feminist and womanist theologies.

Rosemary Radford Ruether talks about a place of cognitive dissonance as the place where theology starts. Ruether suggests, "The starting point for feminist theology, perhaps all theology, is [such] cognitive dissonance. What is, is not what ought to be. Not only that, but what we have been told is, is not always what is, and what we have been told ought to be, is not always what ought to be."² I feel a great deal of affinity with her definition of cognitive dissonance as a point of departure for doing Christian theology because it works with something all human beings experience and has the potential to keep us from feeling too easily satisfied with simple analysis and answers. Moreover, how we experience theological teachings



I believe in a God of justice and peace who, through the life and work of Jesus, calls us to love our enemies; live in communities of accountability; and participate in worship where we proclaim our thanks and praise as well as cry out in our pain, despair, and disbelief.

in embodied ways (i.e. in our churches, neighborhoods, friendships, partnerships, marriages, parent-child relationships) becomes an important source for evaluating (not necessarily discarding) the truth-claims of the Christian tradition. It reasonably follows, then, that the theologian's task includes asking the question: "What is it that my community of faith believes about who God is and how that reality has been made known and is then communicated to the reality of human existence?" I believe in a God of justice and peace who, through the life and work of Jesus, calls us to love our enemies; live in communities of accountability; and participate in worship where we proclaim our thanks and praise as well as cry out in our pain, despair, and disbelief.

I have come of age and come to faith in a religious climate where Christian pacifism, a commitment to nonviolence and John Howard Yoder's revolutionary *The Politics of Jesus* was normative. In this landmark book, Yoder set out to accomplish two "quite discrete tasks." He says,

1. I will attempt to sketch an understanding of Jesus and his ministry of which it might be said that such a Jesus would be of direct significance for social ethics. This is a task of New Testament research immediately within the concerns of biblical scholarship.

2. I will secondly state the case for considering Jesus, when thus understood, to be not only relevant but also normative for a contemporary Christian social ethic.³

As he did his academic work, I think Yoder got it right. I also think that Yoder's sexual misconduct demonstrates the importance of making sure our theology and ethics addresses the cognitive dissonance women have experienced as Christians, and our experience impacts our quest for understanding Jesus of Nazareth as the Living One.⁴ Just as Black liberation theology tries to give an account of Christian faith in the face of Christianity's sanctioning of white supremacy, feminist and womanist liberation theologies seek to give such an account in the face of both male and white supremacy.

It seems to me that the totality of the Jesus Christ events is about proclaiming and extending the visibility and implementation of God's reign among all people. Because Jesus was able to make a choice for nonviolence in the face of death, betrayal, and political mayhem, all Christians need to take the biblical principle of *shalom* seriously. We would be hard pressed to find a Christian who could convince anyone that Jesus promoted the use of violent and potentially lethal force to

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The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.

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advance God's kingdom. Jesus proclaimed God's reign and God's will, both of which are marked by life-giving love and justice-based righteousness. This is the ministerial vision Delores Williams describes in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. She argues that "it seems more intelligent and more scriptural to understand that redemption had to do with God, through Jesus, giving humankind new vision to see the resources for positive, abundant relational life." Moreover, she continues, the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus points to *life* and does not require *our* deaths to be manifest here and now. Williams concludes by explaining that "the [reign] of God is a metaphor of hope God gives those attempting to right the relations between self and self, between self and others, between self and God as prescribed in the sermon on the mount, in the golden rule, and in the commandment to show love above all else."⁵ This is the theological basis for feminist and womanist theologies.

—compiled by Malinda Elizabeth Berry

Notes

1. For a description of womanism/womanist, see Kristen Mathies' article, "Feminism/Fiction/Faith/Friction: How we read," in this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*.
2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (with a new introduction) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), xviii.
3. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).
4. For thought-provoking discussion among feminists about christology, see the side bar "Wisdom tradition and christology."
5. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 165–166.

Wisdom tradition and christology

During the Reformation, Christians in Europe began reading the Bible in ways that put emphasis on the parts of the text of the Old Testament that seemed to foreshadow Jesus' birth. This meant that other books were side-lined and deemed less relevant to the story that the New Testament tells. However, when biblical scholars and feminist theologians began to look more closely at the theology of the early church, they discovered that for many Christians the wisdom literature of the Old Testament was central to the early Christians' understanding of how and why Jesus fulfilled the visions of the prophets.

One way theologians talk about the connection between the two testaments is to ask, "Who and what was Jesus before the incarnation?" Most Christians would go to the opening words of John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1–3a). Theologians talk about this understanding of the pre-existent Christ as *logos* christology.

Understanding Christ as being present and a participant in the act of creation permeates the Old Testament. However, some interpreters argue that the Christ being described is not *logos* (Greek = Divine Word), but *sophia* (Greek = Divine Wisdom). When we turn to the New Testament, Jann Aldredge-Clanton notes, "Early Christian hymns express Christ's pre-existence in the image of divine Sophia Through applying wisdom imagery to Christ, these New Testament hymns stress the continuity between the person of Christ and God's creative, revelatory, and redemptive action."¹ Within the early stages of Christianity, the *sophia* tradition pre-dates the *logos* tradition with the former being based on the wisdom literature of Judaism and the latter being shaped by the Greek philosophical tradition. In the biblical text, *sophia* and *logos* are referred to and personified as female/feminine and male/masculine respectively. As a result, feminist theologians have raised critical questions wondering why the *sophia* christological tradition was, and remains, marginalized in most Christian circles even though this teaching was not considered unorthodox or heretical.

Christian feminists challenge us to consider the idea that faithful christologies are those that keep Wisdom and Word together in their understanding of Jesus' ministry and in their articulation of a sense of the on-going presence of the divine. One way Christians are beginning to express this integration and unity is to use the term Christ-Sophia or Sophia-Christ. This name is both biblical and historical; and it allows Christians to remain mindful of the many metaphors and images that can nurture our faith communities, and, in turn, nurture fellow believers.

To explore this tradition further, I recommend the following texts: *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* by Susan Cole, Marian Ronan, and Hal Taussig (Sheed & Ward, 1996); *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Orbis Books, 2001); and *In Search of the Christ-Sophia: An Inclusive Christology for Liberating Christians* by Jann Aldredge-Clanton (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995).

—Malinda E. Berry

NOTE

1. Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *In Search of the Christ-Sophia: An Inclusive Christology for Liberating Christians* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995), 18–19.

FROM THE editor

Theology and gender are often topics of discussion for the various Mennonite and Brethren-in-Christ denominations that relate with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Since MCC is a church-based organization, sometimes the conflicts over what our theologies have to say about gender are played out in relation to this organization. The MCC organization that I work for is MCC U.S. In 1998, MCC U.S. Board of Directors passed a statement, "Vision and Structure for Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and the U.S. Regions." In this statement, we state that MCC U.S. strives to be inclusive of all persons, respecting and affirming our diversity as we seek to follow Christ's words to love others as ourselves. We feel that *"God is calling MCC U.S. to Spirit-guided mission in the following areas: service to the marginalized; inclusion of all persons, through building anti-racist and anti-sexist congregations, organizations, and communities; and working for justice for the oppressed as an integral part of the church's total witness."*

MCC Bi-national has also developed guidelines regarding gender and MCC's work. From 1994 to 1997, the Gender and Development Project at MCC created a booklet called "A Gender Guide," and it was approved as a guiding document by the MCC executive office. It says, *"As Christians, we affirm that all people are created in the divine image, and that women and men, girls and boys, are equally valued and loved by God."* While this document affirms differences in opinions regarding women's roles in MCC's work overseas, it does state in the beginning paragraph that

women and men are equally valued by God. In the MCC pamphlet called "Principles that Guide Our Mission," it states *"MCC is committed to principles of operation that are non-discriminatory; we seek to understand different points of view, and our service attempts to be without racial or gender qualification."* While these ideals may not always exist in practice, they do exist in our goals; and each person that works with MCC must go through an orientation session that focuses specifically on gender. This orientation session also focuses on biblical passages that give support for women's full inclusion in church and society.

In this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*, the writers focus on their experiences regarding the interplay of theology and gender in their lives. One area of focus is the power of words. As humans, we have a limited view of God; and it is impossible to know the totality of God. One way we try to overcome this is through language (though even this is limiting!). By using different words or images for God other than just God the Father or He; we are able to focus on and call attention to the varied aspects of God. For example, God as a mother hen sheltering her chicks is a feminine image that highlights the nurturing and protective side of God. Nature imagery is also very prevalent in the Bible with God pictured in terms of water, and is referred to as a rock, the ground in which we are rooted, and the wind. These varied images help many to better understand the nature of God. However, for other people, there is an even more basic reason they prefer images of God that are not masculine; they may have had negative experiences with their fathers or male authority figures so only referring to God as a male authority figure can be challenging to their faith. By naming and imagining God in many shapes and sizes other than an older white man with a white beard, we are able to live more fully in our Christian faith.

So while this issue focuses on the writers' experiences with theology and gender, we are not suggesting that these are the only ways to believe. Hopefully, denominations and individual churches will continue to be in conversation with MCC and each other in our plurality.

—Patricia Haverstick, editor



From the desk

- **30th Anniversary Mug.** In 2003, we are celebrating 30 years of work by the MCC Women's Concerns Desks. A mug commemorating the 30th anniversary of Women's Concerns is available for purchase. There is a limited number available of these attractive, green and white mugs that feature an illustration by Teresa Pankratz. The mugs cost \$8 U.S. plus shipping. Please contact Patricia Haverstick, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or tjh@mccus.org.
- **MCC Abuse Web site.** Currently under development is an MCC domestic violence and sexual abuse resource Web site. This Web site is the work of the MCC Canada and MCC United States Women's Concerns programs. Kathryn Mitchell Loewen, the former Women's Network Coordinator for MCC Canada, is coordinating the project. Please visit, and continue to visit, <http://www.mcc.org/abuse> to see this informative site.

Naming God

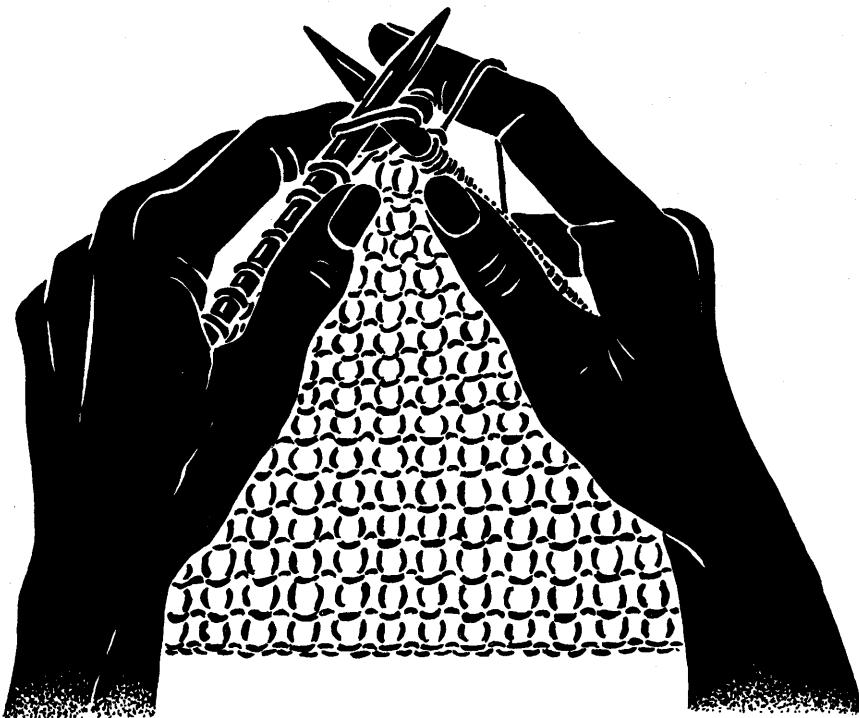
I live in the Netherlands where I worship with an urban Doopsgezind (Dutch Mennonite) congregation. During our Sunday morning services, sometimes we petition God as “Mother and Father.” Even though the members of our church community are not (to my knowledge) uniformly comfortable with the image of God as Mother, our liturgy nonetheless seeks to acknowledge the wealth of metaphors for God available in the Bible and in church history. Such is not the case in all congregations, to say the least.¹ Indeed, in many churches the act of calling God “Mother” is deemed suspect at best, heretical at worst. Concerned churchgoers decry this practice as a dangerous corruption of Christian faith. But some among us are now asking: What if the real danger lies elsewhere? Personally, I have come to believe that if Anabaptist congregations continue to reject feminine metaphors for God, we as a church may lose touch with one of the most important aspects of our history and theology—our penchant for living in the margins.

As North American Anabaptists, haven’t many of us been groomed to identify with those who inhabit the margins? Our childhood heroes were martyrs, our Sunday School curriculum emphasized peacemaking in a culture of violence, and a significant number of our fore-bearers in the faith devoted years of their lives to mission work and faith-based, alternative service. We have heard countless sermons filled with exhortations to live “in the world, but not of the world.” If we as a church wish to continue taking these convictions seriously, then we have certainly got our work cut out for us. There are a whole host of marginal voices out there, voices spanning cultures and centuries, and it is time to open our ears and hear their cries anew.

Who cries to us from the margins of scripture? If we listen, we will hear the rustling of the Spirit at the moment of creation, the birthing of the earth, the sculpting of both woman and man in God’s image. We will hear prophets and poets proclaiming the presence of the Divine in feminine, masculine, and non-gendered images: God as a rock, a shield, and a deliverer;

by Jackie Wyse

Since August 2002, Jackie Wyse has been serving with Mennonite Mission Network as an urban ministry worker in Almeria, the Netherlands. Two months before moving to Europe, Jackie completed her studies at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Jackie enjoys biking, reading, studying languages, making music, and hosting guests.



Even though the members of our church community are not (to my knowledge) uniformly comfortable with the image of God as Mother, our liturgy nonetheless seeks to acknowledge the wealth of metaphors for God available in the Bible and in church history.

It is my conviction that as Anabaptists, we need to relearn the art of listening to the voices that call from the margins of the Bible, of history, and of the world.

a father and a knitter; a lover, a light, and a lion; a woman groaning in child-birth; a mother bird sheltering the vulnerable under her wings.² Some of these metaphors dance on the margins of the biblical imagination, while others feel as familiar as an old, cherished hymn. Taken together, the sheer variety of images for God in scripture is breath-taking and boundary-shattering.

Who cries to us from the margins of history, from the edges of the world around us? If we listen, we will hear Julian of Norwich proclaiming in 1393: "God Almighty is our natural father, and God all-wisdom is our natural mother, with the love and goodness of the Holy Spirit."³ We will witness Elizabeth Cady Stanton writing in 1892: "The first step in the elevation of woman to her true position . . . [is] the recognition by the rising generation of an ideal Heavenly Mother, to whom their prayers should be addressed, as well as to a Father."⁴ We will confront the challenge Rosemary Radford Ruether presents in 1983: "When the word *Father* is taken literally to mean that God is male and not female, represented by males and not females, then this word becomes idolatrous."⁵ If we keep listening, we will hear the angry, bewildered sighs of women (perhaps our grandmothers, mothers, aunts, Sunday School teachers, and maybe even ourselves) whose gifts for ministry and theological thinking have been limited, rejected, or ignored altogether by those in power. If we dare to listen further, we will tremble with the expectant hum of women who, together with the psalmist, wonder how to sing the songs of God in a place of exile.⁶ And we will realize that for many, that place of exile is the church.

It is my conviction that as Anabaptists, we need to relearn the art of listening to the voices that call from the margins of the Bible, of history, and of the world. I believe that if we take the risk to do so, we will find these voices to be both hospitable and prophetic—hospitable because they acknowledge the goodness of the old, familiar names for God; prophetic because they challenge us to feel on our tongues the lightness of God's new names. These are voices that declare with confidence

that God is broader and grander than our words, that the essence of the Divine cannot be captured in any one metaphor. These are voices that weave themselves into a resplendent tapestry before our very eyes.⁷

In order for the church to thrive in the twenty-first century—in order for people of diverse backgrounds to feel warm in its embrace—we must gather this tapestry in our arms and take a look at what we have been given. We must notice the whole cloth: golden fringes, stray threads, sturdy hemlines, frayed patches. Do we have the courage? Can we open ourselves to Mother God who beckons in the pages of scripture, who shouts in the testimony of our sisters across the globe and throughout the ages? If so, we just might hear that the Spirit of God is doing a new thing, and we just might heed the call to participate in Her work. ♦

Notes

1. It is my impression that, on the whole, North American churches offer more resistance to calling God "Mother" than European churches. However, even here in the Netherlands, not all congregations are equally enthusiastic.

2. A sampling of these passages of scripture are as follows: Genesis 1 (the act of creation); Psalm 18 (shield), 27 (light), 36 (bird), 39 (knitter), 42 (rock), and 140 (deliverer); Song of Solomon (lover); Hosea 5:14 (lion); the Gospel of John (father); Isaiah 42:14 (woman in labour); and finally, in Matthew 23:37, Jesus also identifies himself with a mother bird.

3. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love of Juliana of Norwich*, trans. Del Mastro, M.L. (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 187.

4. This sentence is excerpted from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's commentary on Genesis 1:26–28 in *The Woman's Bible*. Available from <http://www.undeleter.org/library/library0041b.html/>.

5. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 66.

6. See Psalm 137.

7. For the image of the biblical canon as a tapestry, I am indebted to Mary Schertz and Perry Yoder, professors at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. See their book: *Seeing the Text* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

God hears:

Listening to Hagar's story

by Melissa Berkey-Gerhard

Melissa Berkey-Gerard is co-founder of the Bayview Learning Center, a college program for women in prison. She works at the YWCA of Brooklyn and is a member of Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship in New York City.

Slavery, coercion, starvation, oppression, the wilderness; Hagar's story has it all. Hagar's story, as found in Genesis 16:1–16 and Genesis 21:9–21, is not a tidy one, nor a triumphant one, at least not at first glance. However, in reading her story over the past few years, her story has become important to me as a story of hope. With the help of Delores Williams and Phyllis Trible, who have been wrestling with the difficult texts of the scripture for years, the story has given me hope in God that I desperately needed. I have found freedom in my spiritual journey, confidence in my own experience, and a framework for understanding how my life and work plays a role in the reign of God.

Hagar's story in Genesis only appears once in three years of lectionary texts, and her life is largely a backdrop for the Abraham and Sarah story. However, I have to wonder if she was only meant to be defined by her position as an enslaved person in Sarah's house, she and Ishmael as a contrast to Sarah and Isaac. I ask, why then would God appear twice to Hagar, and speak directly to her? Why did God not only appear to her, but also make a promise to her like the one made to Abraham and Sarah, the promise of innumerable descendants? Why did God choose to hear and respond to Hagar? Hagar's story has been recorded in scripture for a reason, and perhaps not the reason for which it is usually lifted up.

Hagar is a remarkable woman. She is one of the few people in the Old Testament who meets God directly, automatically setting her off as someone to pay attention to. In spite of her enslavement, her gender, and her Egyptian race; God speaks to her and announces a blessing usually given to men in scripture: the promise of innumerable offspring.

God tells Hagar to name her son Ishmael, which means "God hears." This name serves as a constant reminder that God

is aware of her affliction, hears it and responds to it. As he grows older, every time she calls him into the house from playing outside she is reminded "God hears, God hears." Imagine the heightened tension between Sarah and Hagar because Hagar's child is named, "God hears." The text says Abraham named the son "Ishmael," so either God reiterated the name to Abraham or suddenly Abraham is listening to Hagar. Not only does the name remind Hagar of what God has done, the name reminds everyone else of how God responded to Hagar.

In fact, maybe God spoke to her directly not *in spite of* her status as an enslaved person, her gender, and her race, but *because* she was a female Egyptian slave without standing. She is not the chosen, she is even the "least likely to be chosen," and yet she receives the blessing. This is one reason Hagar has become a positive figure with whom oppressed people can identify and find hope as "Hagar's children."¹ Hagar receives preferential treatment by God, which flies in the face of her society's expectations for her.

Hagar further shapes the reader's understanding of the story by another act of naming; Ishmael is not the only person Hagar names in the narrative. One of the most striking things about this passage is that Hagar names God. According to Phyllis Trible, she is the only person in the scripture who has this power.² She is in a desperate situation and God comes alongside her. She raises her voice and names God "El-Roi," which means "God who sees." A daring act, to say the least, and one that may frighten many of us who are afraid of what will happen if we name God out of our own experience. Hagar's act frees us to respond similarly because we know she is not silenced or punished as she names God out of her experience.

Often times, the only tangible evidence we have of God is the sense that we are

In spite of Hagar's enslavement, her gender, and her Egyptian race; God speaks to her and announces a blessing usually given to men in scripture: the promise of innumerable offspring.



When we suffer, it does not mean we are being punished. It does not mean God condones suffering, slavery, and oppression.

accompanied by God in the most difficult moments. When we have these experiences, we play a mental game by asking, "Was that God? Was God really with me?" Hagar's story gives us the confidence to see that it was God. Yes, God came to me even though I may not be the most oppressed, afflicted person in the world nor the most holy. Even though I don't think I deserve God, I can say, "God you are 'El-roi,' You are God who sees me."

We can not brush over the heart-wrenching elements of Hagar's story. God tells Hagar to return to her mistress and submit to her; in other words, to return to enslavement. I was angry that God would send Hagar back to a situation that was so bad she ran away from it. I have wondered why? But Hagar does not respond that way. Hagar's response re-frames the situation for me. Hagar's act of naming helps me understand the story, helps me re-read God's act versus the acts of humans who

rape, oppress, and enslave. Hagar acts as theologian, giving us a clue about how to understand what God is doing here. She makes me see God from her perspective because she does not seem to think God is giving her bad advice.

Modern day theologians have something to say about this as well. Delores Williams, in *Sisters in the Wilderness*, suggests if Hagar would have stayed in the wilderness it would have been nearly impossible for her to deliver her child by herself, and for the infant to survive there.³ Perhaps the command to return to the house made it possible for Hagar and Ishmael to survive, for God to follow through on the promise for many descendants through her child. And I have to think if Hagar was bold enough to name God, she must have been bold enough to complain if she did not like what God told her to do. Instead she responds, "God hears," and this response helps me to see God's intervention in our lives is not always what we expect or want.

As she returns to the house, Hagar knows her son, the child who is the father of promise, is the child of Abraham. In other words, God does not liberate Hagar.⁴ She is not freed from her situation by a divine magic wand that erases her suffering. But then, she is again cast out into the wilderness with her son and must figure out how to live there. Again, I see that the story is more about accompaniment than liberation, of “making a way out of no way.”⁵

No, it's not the story we want to hear. But, Hagar was desperate twice, and God made a way for her twice. She cried out twice and God heard her twice. We have to have faith that the reign of God on earth is present, though not fully present. When we suffer, it does not mean we are being punished. It does not mean God condones suffering, slavery, and oppression. The full realization of the reign of God is one where all suffering, slavery, and oppression cease.

In this world, Hagar has to help make the way. She is active in her own liberation. While God makes her a promise, she still has to work to keep herself and her child alive. In Genesis 21, when Ishmael is about to die, God opens her eyes. *Hagar* spots the well, and *she* has to make the move to give her son a drink. She lifts up Ishmael with her hand. She then finds him an Egyptian wife so the promise of descendants can be fulfilled.

Why is this empowering? Because God does not do for her what she could do for herself, but gives value to Hagar's work. Hagar moves from one who is acted upon—an enslaved person, a victim—to one who acts. The character Zechariah in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* says, “[God's] not going to do your work for you, so step lively.”⁶ This statement embodies the reality of life. God has come to us, has made the first move, but we are agents in our own spiritual journey. We are the ones who, in step with God, help to make the reign of God evident through our acts of mercy and justice.

We have hope in Hagar's story, that God—whose own son thought he was abandoned—hears our affliction. We have hope that as we go about looking for wells from which to drink, God will hear us and open our eyes. Hagar's story is hard to hear because of her tremendous suffering. But, the story gives us hope that God has not abandoned us although we may suffer. While we are still enslaved, God sees and is present with us.

May Hagar's story become a blessing to us. May it prepare us to participate in this world, to use creativity and discernment as we work to bring forth God's reign. May we, like Hagar, have the courage to see the subtle ways God accompanies us in our lives. May we have the courage to hear the whispers of the reign of God, while we wait for the loud holler. As God made a way for Hagar in the wilderness, so the same God who sees and hears us has made a way for us in Christ.

Editor's note: At the Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating conference, Iris de León Hartshorn gave a sermon/lecture on the Hagar story and wandering. To hear a different perspective on the Hagar story, you can order a tape for \$8 by e-mailing tjh@mccus.org or calling 717-859-1151 and asking for Patricia Haverstick. ♦

Notes

1. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 33.
2. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives, Overtures to Biblical Theology*, eds. Walter Brueggemann et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 12.
3. Williams, 5.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Plume 1999), 98.

Teaching children to cherish their faith and their feminism

by Anita Yoder Kehr with
Hannah and Mayeken Kehr

Anita, Hannah, and Mayeken Kehr make up three-fifths of their family. The other two-fifths are Bryan and Elias. Anita is a pastor at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana; Hannah will attend Bluffton College as a first year student this fall; and Maya will be a sophomore at Bethany Christian Schools.

Hannah: I don't like to read the N.I.V. (New International Version) anymore; it really bugs me when words that were originally intended to include men and women are translated to refer only to men.

The nurturing of our children is a task that seems ever-present, never-enough, and unconscious all at the same time. The lessons we want to teach are communicated most forcefully, perhaps, when we don't realize that we're teaching anything—by our conversations in the car on the way to someplace or by our reactions to events that, we think, have nothing to do with what we want to tell our children. Our daily living teaches more than our carefully thought-through speeches that we give our children on regular occasions. This is true for what we teach and communicate about God.

A decade or so ago, in the midst of the language-for-God wars, the much-beloved congregation that we attended was the site of an extended skirmish. In the process, I found that I lost my ability to address God as "Father," but I also could not easily move to calling the Divine One "Mother." The intensity of feelings on both sides burned me in the middle. Our children (two daughters and a son) were very young then, and I determined that they would not grow up with limited pictures of God. At least, they would not be boxed in by language.

And so my campaign began. Our table grace song became "God is great and God is good/and we thank God for this food./By God's hands we all are fed;/give us, God, our daily bread." In our praying, God was God or "rock" or "redeemer" or "creator" or just about anything but "Father" or "Mother." As I began to prepare for pastoral ministry, I carefully excised any gender-definite language from my meditations and sermons. The formative, youngest years of my children's lives included explanations about the bigness of God and about the various ways that people read and interpret the Bible. So I was interested to see how my daughters, now teenagers, would respond when I asked them what their image of God was.

My oldest daughter, Hannah, a senior at a Mennonite high school when this article was written, knew immediately what I was talking about. It's a question that I'm sure has been a topic in her Bible classes. "Well," she said, "probably the first image of God I had was of 'Father.'" *I gulped.* "But that's not really enough for me. It's the most important one for some of my friends, but I like to think about God as a tree with a swing in it." *That's interesting—a tree? a swing?* "I'm the one sitting in the swing," she clarified. "I need a picture where I am under and surrounded and supported by God, and the tree-with-a-swing-in-it image does that." *What about the Bible? How do you read it? What's important about it?* "The Bible," Hannah said, "is a guidebook. It gives us direction. I don't like to read the N.I.V. (New International Version) anymore; it really bugs me when words that were originally intended to include men and women are translated to refer only to men. And, I'm not so sure about its infallibility." *What do you mean by that?* "You have to read the Bible in context. You have to know what was going on in the situation that's being written about. You need to interpret the Bible." *What do you do with the texts that limit the role of women in the church?* "Most of those passages are in the letters. There were women who followed Jesus, and there were also women who were leaders in the early church. But, you can't just ignore parts of the Bible because you don't like what they say."

Hannah and I continued to talk about her theology and how it compared with that of some of her friends. Two of her best friends approach a number of issues from the opposite direction, and their conversations have become tense and strained sometimes as they've realized the gap that lies between their perspectives on theology and faith.

I asked Hannah whether she considered herself a feminist. "Hmm," she said. "Feminism' has some really negative connotations. But if what we're talking about is women having the same opportunities as men anywhere and everywhere, then, yes, I'm a feminist."

I turned next to our daughter, Mayeken (Maya), who was then in her first year at the same Mennonite high school. "What is your image of God?" I asked her. "What do you mean?" she asked (she hasn't had the right Bible class yet, I guess). After I explained that I meant a picture of God that comes most easily to her mind when she thinks about or prays to God, she said, "Well, I think of God mostly as a spirit." *Anything else?* "Well, I guess I think about him as Father." *At least that was the second response! How about the Bible, Maya, what do you think about the Bible?* "Well," she said, "I think it's a guidebook for us. It's important. There are parts I'm not sure about, though." *What do you do about those parts?* "Well, I think you have to be careful about how you interpret them. It's important to think hard about them." *What happens if you think hard and still disagree with them?* Maya was frustrated by then. "I'm not sure, Mom!!" *Okay, okay. Do you consider yourself a feminist?* "Yes. I mean, I'm pretty sure I do." *When Maya was 8 or 9, she blew up when she learned that women aren't allowed to serve as pastors everywhere. I calmed her down and explained to her the biblical reasoning behind that position, but at the time, I remember thinking, "Here's our activist!" Early adolescence is a time of a lot of change though, so I was glad to hear her affirm her convictions with at least some strength!*

I asked both Maya and Hannah to sing "God is Great" for me. Both of them sang the traditional words. With a measure of indignation, I reminded them that this was not the way I had taught them; we had sung it in our family changing the male pronouns. As soon as I finished talking, they were both nodding their heads. "We knew that," they both said, "but everyone else sings it the other way and that's just how you get used to doing it." *Ugh.*

I didn't interview my son for this article, but someday I'll ask him the same sorts of questions: What is your image of God? How do you think about the Bible? Are you a feminist? How does your perspective affect your faith? I hope—I expect—that I will be both as delighted and as taken aback by his answers as I have been by the answers of my daughters. I look forward to seeing each of them explore the expanse of God, in their own time, in their own way, along their own path, but—hopefully—with fewer obstacles along the way. ♦

When Maya was 8 or 9, she blew up when she learned that women aren't allowed to serve as pastors everywhere.



Feminism/Fiction/Faith/Friction: How we read

by Kristen Mathies

Kristen Mathies is delighted by people, books, travel, God She currently teaches English as a second language to teenagers and lives in Waterloo, Ontario. In recent years she has been a graduate student, writer, non-governmental organization volunteer, and adventurer.

**God is made known
through fiction, through
poetry, through heart-
rending description
and spine-tingling plot,
through quiet lines that
sneak back into your
brain later.**

Come across *The Wide Sargasso Sea*. Come into *The Red Tent* (everyone needs *A Room of One's Own*, but this we can share). Come wearing *The Color Purple*. Bring *Stones From the River* near your home; we will use them to anchor the tent. We will form *A Weave of Women*. Leave behind *The Yellow Wallpaper* in the confining rooms where you lived before. Here in this place, warm enough and cool enough, with space for each person, we will write a new story. Each of us here is a *Woman on the Edge of Time*, unconstrained by context, by syntax. Here in this earthy *Paradise* we share *The Dream of a Common Language*. Our *Evensong* will be sung from the *questions i asked my mother*, the questions we've asked again and again. We will begin to imagine some answers. *Beloved* by God and deep in our work, we are writing a new story.

If you've read the books whose titles are embedded above, their inclusion in a *Women's Concerns Report* about theology and gender may seem obvious, with their themes of liberation, self-determination, and connection with the divine. But God was there, too, with Alice and me as we tumbled down the rabbit hole. God is made known through fiction, through poetry, through heart-rending description and spine-tingling plot, through quiet lines that sneak back into your brain later. Why did Jesus tell stories? So we could see. So we could feel the ideas in our guts, individually and collectively. So we could open our minds and hearts to new understandings.

We need to be able to imagine the world as it could be. In the past two years, I've seen a bold assertion repeated at peace gatherings: "Another world is possible." We have to be able to imagine the possibilities as we create new realities. Another line is chanted as protesters march, dance, sing and whirl through the streets of large cities: "This is what democracy looks like!" We can't create what we can't imag-

ine. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein claimed that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world." If we can't even say something, how can we make it happen? If we can't see it in our mind's eye, how can we act on it? Fiction allows us to imagine what may seem impossible.

Feminist creative and fiction writing is important for many reasons, not least that it gives us language to see God in a new way. Years of Bible stories about a male God created for me an old, white-bearded man with flowing robes, broad shoulders and kind eyes; feminist creative writing creates with me a God who is female, Black, and nearby instead of up high on a marble pedestal. Because of fiction, we can hear Shug Avery (from Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*) say:

"How come [God] look just like [white folks], then? . . . Only bigger? And a heap more hair. How come the Bible just like everything else they make, all about them doing one thing and another, and all the colored folks doing is gitting cursed? . . . God ain't a he or a she, but a It . . . Don't look like nothing . . . It ain't a picture show . . . [Man] on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't."

You may not think God is a tall, broad-shouldered Black woman bearing a striking resemblance to a certain opera singer. You may not know that God and I have painted our toenails, sitting together at a picnic table in my backyard garden. You may not have considered this, but now you have, because you've just read it. Put something in print and no matter how ludicrous you think it is, you've still thought it. So God and her glittery nails have walked through your brain, even if only for a second before being chased back to her throne and given the cotton wool beard to affix to her chin.

Elizabeth Wurtzel writes that the Bible suffers from "Tom Cruise syndrome" with its habit of focusing on the male



characters when it's the women who are the really interesting ones. When men read the Bible, they find themselves there from Adam to Zaccheus. Women have to read the spaces between the words to find ourselves. Our names are there, but not the complete stories. We have to read the words that aren't there. Maybe that's why works of fiction based on biblical characters are so popular in church libraries.

In her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker writes about "‘acting womanish’ . . . wanting to know more and in greater depth than is good for one . . . outrageous, audacious, courageous and willful behavior . . . [a womanist is] responsible, in charge, serious . . . she loves herself. Regardless." Fiction adds to the models of womanish women we see around us. We read in solidarity with them, and to learn from their ways.

As we build communities of resistance to sexism in the world and in the church, feminist creative writing refreshes our souls, giving us strength for the journey. It can push and inspire us to do hard work that needs to be done. *Possessing the*

Secret of Joy is another of Alice Walker's novels, in which a woman, moments away from execution, is uplifted by friends who raise a banner proclaiming "RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY!" Feminist fiction, when writing about the world with integrity, will not allow its readers complacency. It demands resistance to injustice. It makes us restless. It gives us strength to make things happen, to make positive change.

On page seven of yesterday's newspaper there is a picture of a woman. She is far away, she is staring straight at me, and she makes all the words around her fuzzy and irrelevant. She is huddled in a trench in the middle of a war and two of her children huddle with her, faces pressed against their mother, their familiar weight rigid with fear. I know the sweet lima bean shapes, the curved backs of scared children, and I can feel their lightness, their panic, the weak shudders of tears as if my hands were pressed against their backs. Whether they still scream or cry is unknown; whatever sound they might make is muted by the crossfire they are caught in. This woman's eyes over the backs of her children are the words we read.

As we build communities of resistance to sexism in the world and in the church, feminist creative writing refreshes our souls, giving us strength for the journey.

Feminist fiction listens to this woman. Feminist fiction gets our attention, then invites her to speak. Feminist creative writing is fiction and reality, real even when it isn't. If feminism is the belief in and working towards equality for women and men, won't feminist fiction do that too? Alice Walker again: "Deliver me from people who say how we live doesn't matter. If art doesn't make us better, than what on earth is it for?"

So, feminist fiction. Because feminist fiction gives me a new set of lungs to breathe with when I'm gasping for breath. New eyes, new tongue . . . new space inside of me to bristle and spark with questions of faith. Because in fiction, God and I can ride the Coney Island Ferris wheel.

Because Alice Walker herself sat in the pew in front of me, leaning back to whisper sly jokes so I'd stay cool enough to keep my wits about me instead of hurling hymn books. Because in fiction you can read and write "I" and know that means you too. Because fiction won't check your gender first to see if you're a worthy reader; if you've got eyeballs and a brain, you are. (Actually, the eyeballs are optional. Ears or a sense of touch will do just as well.) Because Jesus loved a good story. Because we're all story, no matter how much some argue that they are fact and reality and God's truth all rolled up into one. Because God came to us in story, and still does. Because we don't know how the tale will unfold. ♦

Men as women's allies in the church

by Brad Schantz and
J. Denny Weaver

Brad Schantz will be a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison beginning September 2003. After graduating from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2000, he spent two years working at the seminary before serving this last academic year as an interim instructor of religion at Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio.

J. Denny Weaver is professor of religion at Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio. He and his wife Mary have three adult daughters and five grandchildren. He has written *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Eerdmans, 2001), which has chapters on learning from feminist and womanist theologies.

Compiler's Note: I asked Brad and Denny to discuss what they understand Mennonite women's work to be about and how they as men can and should participate in this work. Whether it's planning a potluck or dismantling patriarchy, these important tasks are considered to be "women's work" rather than *everyone's* work. They told me, "Our conversation reminded us of the prevailing influence of sexism," which is an admission that many men have yet to make.

Brad: Denny, how did you become aware of the feminist agenda?

Denny: I grew up in a Mennonite congregation where male dominance or sexism was assumed—it was like the air we breathed—it was not named and initially I was not aware of it. It was just normal that men ran the show and that women did not preach. I do remember thinking that it was not fair women always had to do things like wash the dishes, but I still thought that was just the way it was.

My movement away from sexism was gradual. Late in college I started to become aware of feminist issues. At first I was not overly impressed, and I am sure that I made more than one disparaging remark about "women's lib." But eventually I did come to see that women should be treated as equals, be allowed to do what I was allowed to do, and be admitted to structures and offices on equal footing. At that point, acknowledging the equality of woman was what I could perhaps call an "add-on"—women could be "added" to the existing structures. But as I tried to work with the "add-on" concept, I came to see that more was called for. "Adding-on" did not work; it still preserved the male-dominant structures. True equality meant rethinking the structures from the ground up.

Now, I have talked too much. Brad, how did you become aware of the importance of the feminist agenda?

Brad: That's ok; you're older and have more experiences to reflect on. Oddly enough though, even while I am at least a generation younger than you, my experience is similar. I grew up in a community and church where women were not allowed to be in public or formal leadership positions. They could lead music and teach children and youth classes, but they weren't allowed to preach, lead worship, or teach many of the adult classes. While some of these attitudes changed over time, it was only after I left the community and met women who were gifted in ministry and preaching that I started truly to understand how pervasive and wrong sexism is.

Denny: Are there any particular learning experiences that stand out for you?

Brad: Two experiences come to mind. The first was in Hesston College's Pastoral Ministry Program. One of my colleagues was a woman named Carol Swartzendruber. Carol's friendship, patience, and ministerial gifts began to crumble remaining doubts I had about the role of women in church leadership. Not long after, I worked briefly with a pastor from Oregon named Patty Friesen. After working with her for only one week, and seeing her gifts, my consciousness was finally liberated from the sinful belief that sexism in the church was ok. I left Oregon convinced that women should be full partners with men in all aspects of life, community, and church. Those experiences orient me today. Not only do I want to help confront sexism, I can't imagine my life today without the strong pastoral leadership and guidance offered to me by women.

Denny: Right, even when I thought Dorothy Nickel Friesen was the right person to be pastor at First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, having her as my pastor for nearly 10 years still taught me a lot about accepting and working with women as pastors and leaders. I say the same thing about working with my president, Lee Snyder, at Bluffton College. After experiencing their leadership, it really seems antiquated and silly when I hear someone suggest that women ought not to be leaders over men.

This means that we have both changed in our attitudes toward women's roles and women's leadership. What does it mean for you now, after a year of teaching and as you think about starting graduate school?

Brad: As a biblical scholar and teacher, it means a number of things. It means acknowledging the Bible as my faith-text, *but* one written from a patriarchal or kyriarchal¹ point-of-view. It has meant that I learn to read the text while listening to and for the voices of women. It means I make a point to read feminist and womanist texts and interpretations whenever I study and write, and it means making space in the classroom for women's voices, perspectives, and scholarship. Even more so, it means that I integrate these resources matter-of-factly. As Mary Schertz said, one of the most helpful things men can do to diminish sexism is to use words like "feminism" and "womanism" and "sexism" seriously.

Brad: As Mary Schertz said, one of the most helpful things men can do to diminish sexism is to use words like "feminism" and "womanism" and "sexism" seriously.

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You've been a teacher for a while, what difference has it made for you?

Denny: I have made a conscious effort not to use sexist language (like "man" as a reference to all people), and never to refer to God as a male being. I once said that it was too hard for an adult to change these thought and speech patterns—but I was wrong! I have trained myself to think and speak in gender-neutral ways. And more than just language change is needed. As I mentioned earlier, I came to the conclusion that the whole system needs to change, from institutional structures to the way we "do" theology and biblical studies—from whom we hire to how we read the Bible.

Denny: I once said that it was too hard for an adult to change these thought and speech patterns—but I was wrong! I have trained myself to think and speak in gender-neutral ways.

But perhaps even more importantly, becoming aware of feminist issues has brought me to see the specific need to re-conceptualize the entire theological paradigm. Becoming aware of feminist concerns has laid bare the extent to which the received paradigm of standard theology (what some would call "orthodoxy") is really male-dominant. It will not do just to add a feminist concern to that supposed foundation. The entire structure of our theology should be thought through again, starting with the story of Jesus. In that way, issues raised by feminist scholars are very pointedly an integral part of my recent work on atonement theology.

But talking about revising our entire theological paradigm is also a hard saying. There is resistance to it, even from a lot of women. What do you think about that resistance?

Brad: Interesting question. I guess it means that like a lot of things in life, it comes with a price. It has taken immense patience, stamina, graciousness, and exercise of power, especially by women, to get to this point—the least I can do is join in the struggle to overcome that resistance. It also means that I have to keep struggling alongside women to overcome sexism. Beyond learning proper language and openly dealing with these issues in

our classrooms, more than anything it means that I must continue to cultivate respectful, appropriate open relationships with women as peers, teachers and friends. In fact, as Christian men I believe *the only way* we can continue to grow in our struggle against sexism is by staying in close dialogue and relationship with women. It is only from women that we can learn how and where and when the institutions still oppress women. And it is only from women that we can learn how and where and when we ourselves are still part of the system. As one woman colleague expressed, sometimes it's just the personal loyalty and friendship of men that offers the greatest support.

Denny: You make a really important point when you talked about continuing to grow. Part of confronting sexism for people like me is realizing that I have never fully arrived. I said that I had learned to speak in gender-neutral language. But the thing is I am still aware of how I am working on language and images for God. The fact that I am always working at it shows that I am not there yet. It is a reminder to keep listening and to be willing to listen to challenges and suggestions—from my wife and my daughters and my colleagues, who continue to teach me.

Brad: Good point—we're not "there" yet and never will be.

Denny: And we need to acknowledge that this is not "doing women a favor."

Brad: Exactly—we're simply helping change an injustice that has been perpetrated against women for millennia. ♦

Note

1. Kyriarchal is from *kyrios* (Greek = Lord) and means "The Rule of the Lord." As Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses it, it refers to social systems that are like Wink's "Domination Systems" and by implication are patriarchal and would include systems of racism, oppression, economic injustice, etc.

Crazy quilt: Lament for mothers lost

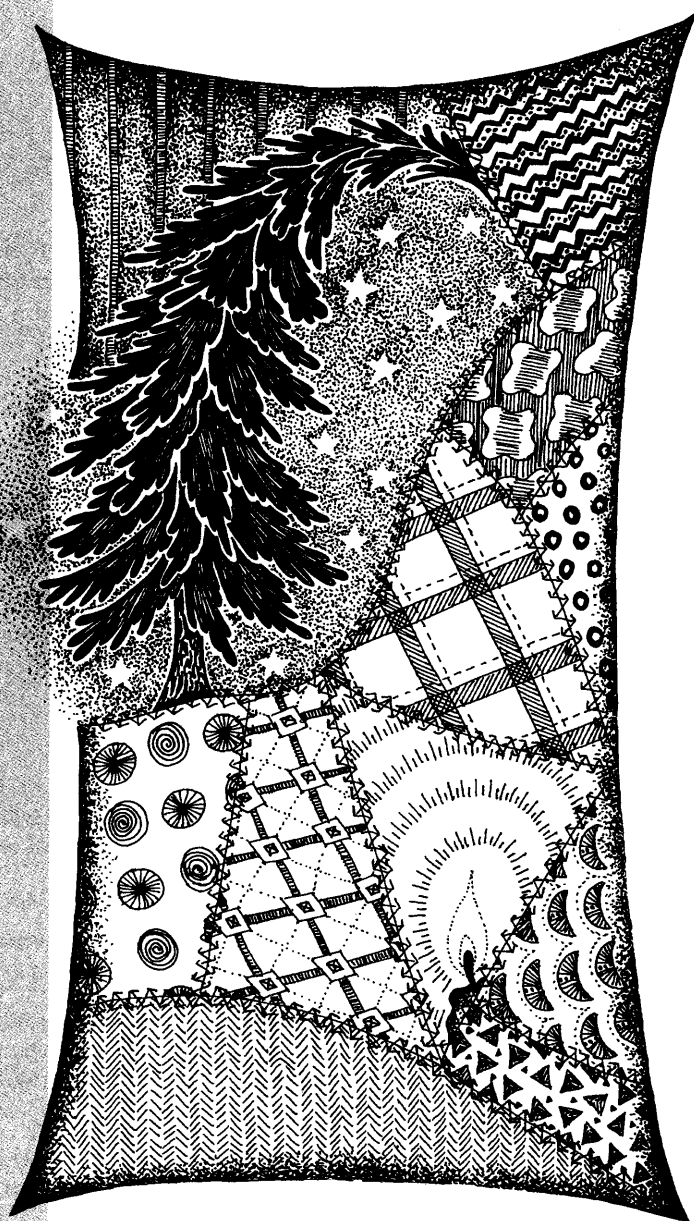
by Carol Grace Hurst

Carol Grace Hurst is a clinical social worker who lives in Crozet, Virginia. She and spouse Jon Nafziger have three sons: Andrew (11), Michael Robin (7), and Gabe (2).

I cannot remember the names of my mother line.
It was too late for review when my mother hurried
away at 57
Leaving me
an old quilt, in tatters, that had been her
grandmother's
much washed as though to scrub away pain. This
square of she who wept for?
I cannot remember. Do not grope into private places
best left untouched.
Look at this piece joined here to a man with blue eyes
that sparkle that smile and
Go on.

A family's crazy quilt, cut in broken shapes and peaced
at odd angles.
We make a lineage. The dark, the light, the bleeding
into tomorrow.
I reach back to you. I cannot remember your names
but I hold you in my belly and
Dream. I cry your loss hanging your work above the
mantle in the
Room of my firstborn's entrance. And in the dark
before dawn
I cry for your strength "Mama help me!"
Bring me your pine tree bending strength under the
weight of this—

Candle light flickers on forms seeming to slip out of the
Stitches to watch at the edge of the veil.
I wait on the rising tide
Clinging to my manfriend's clasp, and the pulse of
generations
Washes through me.
I do not remember your names but we are
"Mama."





Women working for equality in Iraq. Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) members recently made contact with a group working for women's rights in Iraq. The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) was formed immediately following the war to prevent atrocities committed against women and to help them obtain legal, social, and economic equality. They are working for changes to Iraq's constitution that allow male family members to kill female family members in what is called "honor" killings. OWFI would also like for the U.N. to become more involved in the process of rebuilding Iraq; the occupation by the United States is not seen as a blessing. Already, the occupation has allowed for the return of tribal ways with ancient patriarchal structures that suppress women. —Peggy Gish, "Iraq: Women working for equality," *CPTnet*, July 14, 2003.

Women in Nepal. Carolyn Holderread Heggen, an MCC worker in Nepal that works with United Mission to Nepal (UMN), recently visited a rural area of Nepal. She was moved by the courage of the women she met. Here is one of the stories she heard: Pabitra is about 35. As a six-year-old little girl, she begged and begged to go to school because she wanted to learn how to read. Her parents would not let her because "girls don't need to go to school and if you learn how to write, you will write a letter to some boy and arrange your own marriage and that would shame our whole family." When

she refused to eat or drink for several days, they finally gave in and let her study for two years. But then they put their foot down and said, "Enough!" At 14, they arranged her marriage to an older man. For the first 8 years of her marriage, she was never allowed to leave her in-laws' compound, not even to go shopping for food. Her husband would disappear for several years at a time and she didn't know where he was. Her in-laws made her do all the work for them, working in the field, carrying water, cooking, washing the clothes. One time when her husband came home she got pregnant and now has a 15 year old daughter.

Pabitra met a community worker who worked for UMN and told her she wanted to help other women who'd never had a chance to go to school. She was encouraged to start literacy classes with some beginning reading books that UMN people had developed and started holding night classes by kerosene light in a little shop a half hour's walk from her house. Her in-laws were angry and accused her of having another "man." Once her husband came home and showed up at her reading class; in a drunken fit he smashed her kerosene lamp. He left and she hasn't seen him for 10 years now. She thinks her life is better that way. She still teaches women how to read because she thinks that is one of the most important ways to help women understand that they are worth something. She says if you know how to read it gives you lots of pride and power. ♦

Women in church leadership

Editor's note: Recipients have been named for the Quiet Shouts Seminary Scholarship, which was announced in the May–June 2003 issue of *Report*. Please see "News and verbs" for information about the recipients and the scholarship program.

Phyllis Kramer has been appointed pastor at Windsor Mennonite Fellowship in Windsor, Ontario.

Amy Kratzer began an assignment as Associate Pastor with a focus on worship and youth ministry on July 1, 2003, at Sunnyside Mennonite Fellowship, Elkhart, Indiana.

Melissa Roth became the pastor at St. Louis Mennonite Church, St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 2003.

Tina Schlabach has begun a pastorate at Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana.

Mary Mae Schwartzenruber began a pastorate at Bloomingdale Mennonite Church in Dorchester, Ontario, in September 2003.

Sharon Wyse Miller will begin a pastoral assignment in September 2003 at the Ambler Mennonite Church, Ambler, Pennsylvania.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM). Across Canada and the United States, advocates for victims of domestic violence are joining with government officials, corporations, unions, health care providers, faith-based groups and others to organize DVAM activities that raise public awareness about domestic violence. The goals of most DVAM activities are similar: to raise awareness about the prevalence and cost of domestic violence, the need for prevention and the availability of services for victims of abuse. The MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Desk has prepared a bulletin insert for use by churches and other interested people to raise awareness of domestic violence. Please contact Beth Graybill, Women's Concerns Director, at 717-859-1151 or bgraybill@mccus.org for more information. Events include:

- October 8—Organized by the National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence, a project of the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF), Health Cares About Domestic Violence Day encourages health care providers to "Screen to Prevent Abuse." To help raise awareness of domestic violence as a health care issue, hospitals, health associations and insurance companies around the country have planned events and activities. For more information visit the FVPF's web site, www.end-abuse.org, or contact the National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence toll-free at 1-888-Rx-Abuse.
- October 19 through October 25—Organized by the YWCA of the USA, the YWCA Week Without Violence encourages domestic violence awareness and violence prevention activities including tree plantings, candlelight vigils and community forums. Each day of the public education campaign addresses a different form of violence: Monday, October 20 is "Protecting Our Children," and Wednesday, October 22 is "Confronting Violence Against Women." For more information visit the YWCA's Web site, www.ywca.org. In Canada, visit www.weekwithoutviolence.ca to learn more about the YWCA's Week Without Violence programs there. A Week Without Violence organizer's kit and other resources and tools are available online.

- Throughout October—The Body Shop (TBS) and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) have organized a phone drive. All TBS stores will be collecting deactivated cell phones throughout October to support NCADV's programs serving battered women and children. For more information contact Rita Smith at NCADV, 303/839-1852, ext. 105, or Kim Burrs at TBS, 650/558-1192, ext. 8579.
- Throughout October—The No More Tour is a multi-city tour designed to raise awareness about violence against women. The tour features events at local universities; including a film festival showcasing the winning films from the Stop the Violence short film contest. The tour has stops in Atlanta, Georgia; Austin, Texas; Los Angeles, California; New York, New York; and Washington, D.C. For more information, contact Sharon Isenberg via phone: 212/626-3382, or via email: Sharon_isenberg@liz.com.

Reprinted and adapted from 'News Flash' (<http://www.fvpf.org/newsflash>), an online newsletter of the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

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Feminine biblical images of God

"Father," as is often used for God, is a metaphor designed to help us understand something of the intimacy, authority, care and protection that is part of God's nature in relation to humankind. While this is an important metaphor for God, it is becoming more common to hear feminine names and images of God in our churches, and to see feminine metaphors of God in our church periodicals. These other names, images, and metaphors come directly from scripture.

The Bible suggests a myriad of ways to think of God, and these can help us to identify with the other important attributes of God. Below are examples of verses that would more closely identify with the use of the word "Mother" for God.

GOD IS (OR IS LIKE A) . . .

woman giving birth	Isaiah 42:14
female and male parental image	Deuteronomy 32:18 and Job 38:28-29
nursing mother	Isaiah 49:15
mother comforting her child	Isaiah 66:13
midwife	Psalms 22:9-10
mother bear	Hosea 13:8
baker woman	Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21
woman seeking a lost coin	Luke 15: 8-10

For further study, see *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983).



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WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT

Looking Forward

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2003

Looking forward

JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2004

Gifts of the Red Tent:
Women Creating

MARCH–APRIL 2004

Women and immigration

MAY–JUNE 2004

Men's changing roles

Cincinnati Mennonite Arts Weekend. This year's theme, "Encounters at the Margins," is inspired by the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well (John 4: 1–42), and invites participants to explore—through art—relationships with persons, ideas, and beliefs that extend the margins. The seventh Arts Weekend will be held February 6–8, 2004, and continues its tradition of encouraging the arts in the Mennonite community; furnishing a setting for interaction and exchange of ideas. Presenters and performers including Ann Hostetler, Anita Lehman, Chuck Neufeld, Cheryl Pannabecker, Tim Shue, Lucia Unrau, and David Wright will be featured. For more information, contact Hal Hess at 513-351-8785 or e-mail schess@earthlink.net.

Scholarships awarded. The Women in Leadership Subcommittee (WILS) of Lancaster Mennonite Conference has awarded four Quiet Shouts Seminary Scholarships for the 2003–2004 academic year. This scholarship supports Lancaster Mennonite

Conference women pursuing pastoral studies towards a Masters degree at an accredited seminary. The scholarship is made available through donations and from the royalties of *Quiet Shouts*, authored by Louise Stoltzfus (a former *Women's Concerns Report* editor who died in November 2002). The women who were awarded \$1000 scholarships are: Theda Good, Lancaster, Pa., who is pursuing a Masters of Divinity degree at Eastern Mennonite Seminary; Karen Sensenig, Ephrata, Pa., who is studying in the Master of Divinity program at Eastern Mennonite Seminary; Marilyn Kurtz, Willow Street, Pa., who is working towards a Master of Arts in Church Leadership degree at Eastern Mennonite Seminary-Lancaster Extension; and Lynn S. Parks, Philadelphia, Pa., who is pursuing a Masters of Divinity in Practical Theology at Regent University. Donations are welcome towards this scholarship fund. For more information about WILS or the scholarship, contact Carol Oberholtzer at 717-626-9361.